

FURTHER NOTES ON A VERY OLD CARDINAL

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In previous issues of this journal (December, 1933, December, 1934, and December, 1935) I have given the history of a male Cardinal, banded by me at my home on February 12, 1924. I am glad to be able to say that at this writing (November 10, 1936) the bird is still living and is therefore more than thirteen years old. So far as I am able to learn, it is the oldest known small wild bird.

It will be recalled that the winter of 1935-36 produced some of the coldest weather on record including subzero temperatures here, and that the drouth of the past summer was particularly severe, yet this bird came through in good condition. There are unmistakable evidences of age however. When feeding at his shelf he does not stand erect with head held high as do the younger Cardinals. Instead, he crouches or even sits down while eating. His head is held resting on his shoulders so constantly that when the neck is occasionally straightened, the feathers do not fall to cover the gap and a bare section of neck is exposed. Molting has become slow and tedious; at this writing there is still a ragged appearance on the upper breast. During the drouth he was much troubled with mites until I trapped him and dusted his feathers with insect powder. After the nesting season this year his pugnacity has been entirely lacking. The song of spring and summer was regular though somewhat subdued.

In the last instalment, I recorded that this male mated with a young female early in April, 1935, on the day after his former mate was killed. The two remained mated through that year and through the present season. The pair remained together all during the winter of 1935-36, roosting on branches under the eaves of the garage and visiting the feeding shelf together for their breakfast each morning. With the first signs of spring in February, the male demonstrated the awakening of a devotion for his mate by feeding her at the shelf. This has occurred each year at this season. Their first nest was begun on March 28 in a bush-honeysuckle shrub, thirty feet from the house, and on April 18, the female began sitting on three eggs. These were immediately taken, presumably by a grackle. (The shrub at the south window, which has held the male's first nest for many years, was not chosen this year, possibly because another pair of Cardinals were prospecting the site at the time). The second nest was built six feet up in a lilac shrub close to the dining room window. It was begun on April 20 and finished in a week. Incubation, always by the

female, began on May 1 and on the 15th the nest was seen to hold three small young. A high wire guard was placed around the shrub but on the night of May 19, a cat climbed this, pulled the nest over and ate the young. At 8 A. M. the female was seen to fly to the wrecked nest with a large green worm, not yet able to realize the young were gone.

Ten days later the male was observed to be particularly attentive to his mate, feeding her constantly from the grain on the shelf. The long drouth, which dated from April 9, was already making itself felt however and, apparently sensing its continuance, no new nest was begun. The drouth broke on July 2 with copious rains but a nest had been finished a few days before and the female had begun incubation on July 1, on three eggs. This nest was built eight feet up near the top of a privet, against the house next door. Here success finally crowned their efforts and three healthy youngsters left the nest late in the afternoon of July 20. Two of the young were taken in charge by the female and one by the old male. The former were constantly about the premises until the young had fully reached maturity when they supposedly joined a wandering flock of a dozen birds. The old male and his charge soon left the premises and were absent through most of August and September though showing up occasionally. On August 3, a male Towhee whipped him off the shelf, whereon he had regularly breakfasted for years, and from that day to this he has not been seen to return to it. He has taken up quarters in shrubbery at the opposite end of the house, adopted a new feeding shelf there, lost the youngster he raised and became a hermit. He pays no attention to his mate of the past two years. She feeds regularly at the old stand but also keeps to herself and it remains to be seen whether the companionship of last winter will be resumed when the leaves are gone. The constant care and feeding of the late hatched and perhaps wayward fledgling seems to have thrown the old male entirely off his former manner of living.

ADDENDUM. (February 15, 1937). I regret to add that the old Cardinal has not been seen since November 20. And while it is possible that he may have established quarters elsewhere, it is more probable that, having become senile and inactive, death has befallen him. Should he return I will report in this journal. The female continues her daily breakfast at the old shelf, usually accompanied by her new mate.—A. F. G.

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